

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Tuesday, February 28, 2017

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Date: Tue, 28 Feb 2017 11:58:05 -0500
Attachments: 20170228 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (114.69 kB)

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Tuesday, February 28, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Energy Costs

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Speaker, this government likes to say that hindsight is 20/20 when they talk about the electricity crisis. A couple of weeks ago the leader of the official opposition and I were in Timmins. We welcome the folks from Timmins here with us this morning. Let's go back to 2014 when the city of Timmins paid 3.7 million dollars for electricity. Now there's an increase of 1.6 million dollars on the budget. So Speaker, how much more does the Premier think that she can squeeze out of the people of Timmins?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to rise and respond to the question relating to what this government has done to ensure that we are finding ways to lower rates for all Ontarians and for municipalities. As the Premier said in the past, we've done some hard work, the heavy lifting to ensure we rebuild the system that no longer is relying on coal and ensuring that we build a system where we have power in the north. Making sure we rebuild our transmission system that was left in shambles when we took over in 2003. What we've done is find ways of reducing those costs that we've had. I'll make sure I answer more of that in the supplementary.

>>MPP Smith: Back to the Premier, the government has lit the House on fire and they're trying to use the garden hose to put out the flames. Let's go back to 2014. Healthcare which operates 4 hospitals in my region, paid 2.1 million dollars in electricity costs in 2014. It's up 600,000 dollars since then. That's almost 30%. If the Premier doesn't want to talk about dollars, let's talk about doctors. How many more doctors is the electricity crisis going to cost the patients in the Quinte region of Ontario?

>> Minister Thibeault: It's interesting to hear from that side of the House they're actually going to close one of those hospitals. This government kept those hospitals opened and invested in healthcare to make sure we have doctors in that part of the province. Let's look at the facts. We've ensured that we've got programs in place to help hospitals. For example, in my riding, the health sciences north saved about 200,000 dollars a year after using the save on energy program. They're putting that money back into healthcare services. There are programs in place. There are systems in place to ensure that we keep the lights on, that we keep the operating room and at the same time reducing costs. We're going to continue to find ways to do more.

>> MPP Smith: It's time for this government to stop doing more because every time they do more it hurts more and more the people of Ontario. Just before the end of the business day yesterday, my office was made aware of a family in Chatham Kent. The same utility that controls both the electricity and the water for this family, on Friday when their electricity was turned back on, their water was turned off. They were told it would only be turned back on when they were no longer in arrears. Cities, hospitals, families, all hurting. That's your Ontario, Premier. That's your Ontario. Everybody is hurting. Speaker, what price is too high for this government?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many electricity companies that look after both water and electricity. When they look after the water component, they're looking after that for their local municipal. I would encourage them to contact their local municipal. But we will find ways to continue to do more, Mr. Speaker. If we were actually to follow what that party did, we would have left our system in shambles. We would have relied on coal. We no longer want to rely on coal. We want to make sure we have a clean system -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Coming back to disconnections, Mr. Speaker, last week we had the bill pass this House unanimously which was great news. I was very pleased to see the oeb acted very quickly and decisively. They issued a decision to make sure they have all of these reconnections connected.

MPP Harris to Premier Wynne (Hoskins) Re: Rare Diseases

>> MPP Michael Harris: Thanks, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. One year ago hundreds of patients who travelled here from across the province caught the Liberal government strike down a PC motion sufferers had counted on for rare disease. They are here today. Now they would begin taking action. Speaker, it's been a year. What concrete action has the government taken?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: I just want to say that we know that many Ontarians have family members who are struggling with a rare disease or disorder. Our hearts go out to them, Mr. Speaker. But because these diseases are very rare, often they are misdiagnosed. I'm very pleased that we've been able to move ahead. Just yesterday the Minister announced an expansion to clinics for those needing specialized care. As the member knows, there's a working group of experts that is in place who can explore services for people with rare diseases can be improved in Ontario. These are very challenging, very specific situations, Mr. Speaker. We need to have experts who give us ongoing advice in the interim. The Minister has announced an increase of support for clinics.

>> MPP Harris: While we were happy to see eds sufferers who were forced to come to queen's park last year get their clinic, the fact is they have travelled to the legislature in failing health before the Minister would do anything. It seems the Liberal government only acts for Ontarians after they've been forced to come to queen's park to beg for life-saving support and the cameras are on. While it may have been politically expedient, so did the hopes for hundreds of thousands of other sufferers with cystic fibrosis, pku, ahus or a host of other rare diseases. It's rare disease day. The cameras are back on. Will the Premier report where and what it is strategy to help Ontarians suffering from all rare disease.

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As much as the member opposite might want to try to make this political or try to make it partisan, it's been the better part of two years. In fact, this Premier LED the charge nationally for the creation of a working group on rare disease long before the member opposite raised this in the legislature can. Importantly, we did here from patients with eds and thanks to their important advocacy and the advocacy of the group that represents them, we were able to create a task force which included patients and patient advocates on it. An expert task force and panel that actually LED to the creation of the announcement I made yesterday which is funding of a million dollars ongoing for a partnership with university health network and sick kids to provide specialized care specifically for children and adults with eds.

>> MPP Harris: Speaker, this Minister has had the Ontario citizens council report on strategies since 2010 and has done nothing with it. He told us last spring we would have working group recommendations within three months. We're knee deep in empty words. What we need is action. If he has a report, he should table it today. When it comes to governing, it's about choices and priorities. Choices to strike down a rare disease select committee in favour of the behind the doors working group. Prioritizing to spend what's left of our tax dollars on the matters that will best impact the lives of all Ontarians. Unlike relocating gas plants. Speaker, will the Premier tell us why when it came to a choice between subsidizing a Tesla owner with massive rebates versus spending to treat rare disease, she went with a new car.

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we decided instead of having politicians make these decisions in the form of a select committee, we knew from advocates, from patients, we knew many of the steps that needed to be taken. We created a working group comprised of the experts, a working group on rare diseases. I have not received a final report. I'm expected receive it in the coming weeks. A working group chaired by a paediatrician from the hospital for sick children. The senior vice president of the university health network. A patient caregiver. A physician lead at uhn. A doctor, director of newborn screening Ontario. The exact and precise people who should be providing that advice to the government. They're doing that.

MPP Singh to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Energy Costs

>> MPP Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. The Premier has said she will look at fixing hydro. The Premier has had 2014 years to look at solving the problem and 4 years as Premier. 4 years as Premier and 14 years as a government to solve a crisis they helped create. Ontario needs more than a Premier or an electricity Minister to look at solutions to this crisis. They need someone who is going to act on solving this problem. Here's the question. A concrete thing this government can act on. Will this government act to commit to a real promise to end rural delivery charges.

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, there are many ideas that are coming forward. I appreciate the member opposite putting forward ideas. That plan will be a plan to reduce electricity prices immediately, Mr. Speaker. The 8% reduction is already on people's bills. It's already being taken off people's bills. The plan we bring forward will mean more immediate reductions. Unlike I would say the plan that was brought forward by the NDP. The cornerstone of which is a pillar, the repurchasing of Hydro One which would not take one cent of one bill.

>> MPP Singh: Here's another idea. Ending time of use fees. It will actually impact people immediately and have a real impact on their lives. Take, for example, Anne Marie. She's a senior living in Hamilton. She's recently been told she's got to start using an in-home oxygen making machine. It will increase her bill by 250 dollars. If she could opt out of time of use fees, she could be at home, use her machine during the day instead of having to be up all night and worrying about how she's going to afford a machine. The question is this is how it should be. Hydro is a necessity. Will the government commit to ending the time of use fees.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to time of use, Mr. Speaker, time of use actually provides an overall benefit to the entire province by conserving power during peak demand. But we do understand like the example that was used by the Honourable member that there are some people that do need to use power during peak times. That's why, Mr. Speaker, we've already started the process with our system operator of looking at actually having some type of alternative plan, having time of use and having a flat rate plan. We're so far into this that the oeb has started a pilot project looking at that. But the important thing for us on this one case is the individual that needs to use a piece of medical equipment can apply for the Ontario electricity support program and see their benefits double, Mr. Speaker. I do hope that person gets access to that information.

>> MPP Singh: Mr. Speaker, people in Ontario need to see real changes that will impact their life right now to make sure the hydro system is actually working for them. The Premier says they're working on it. But they have had lots of time. They have been in power since before Facebook was a thing, since destiny's child was -- people were still renting vhs tapes from blockbuster. This government has had a lot of time. How much more time will it take so people will see justice?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been in power long enough to ensure that we've eliminated, to ensure that our system is reliable. We've been in power long enough to ensure people can actually use our system and not worry about having a Brown out. We invested in our system over the last 14 years to make it a better system, a cleaner system and to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that people who have asthma can go outside and take a breath of fresh air and not worry about having a smog day which we haven't had in this province since 2014. We need to be proud of that. (Applause) Other provinces are looking to us, Mr. Speaker, because we've been leading the way in building a system that's clean and reliable.

MPP Singh to Premier Wynne (Duguid) Re: Infrastructure Investment

>> MPP Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Yesterday the Premier said if stopping the sell-off of Hydro One is a priority, then investing in infrastructure would have to take a back seat. Just because the Premier said Ontario can't have affordable power and build infrastructure doesn't mean it's true. The Premier continues to repeat it. It doesn't make it

more true. My question is this. I'm pretty sure Ontario – I'm also sure over that century that we've built infrastructure. We've -- My question is why can't this Premier do the same thing.

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: It's very interesting. The member opposite makes the assertion that there has been building of infrastructure in a rational way over decades. That's actually not true. The reality is that we're in a long period where there were decades where infrastructure was not built, where investments were not made, Mr. Speaker. We know if there isn't a 5% investment in infrastructure year over year and that can be a combination of Federal, provincial and municipal contribution, then in fact we're not even keeping up with let alone building new infrastructure that's needed. So we've actually tackled that, Mr. Speaker. We've actually broken -- For at least 20 years. So we're going to continue to build infrastructure because that leads to economic growth and that leads to the well-being of people in this province.

>> MPP Singh: The Premier said when she talks to businesses about coming to Ontario, they want to know about infrastructure. I think that makes sense. A part of that infrastructure is the cost of hydro. Does the Premier admit that sky-high rates are hurting businesses in Ontario and discouraging other businesses from investing in our province?

>> Premier Wynne: Actually, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you that in all of the conversations that I have had in other countries, the number 1, number 1 issue that people raise with me is availability of talented skilled people. That is the number 1 concern. And it's the number 1 reason that businesses come to Ontario. You talk to Thompson Reuters. They're coming here because of well-educated talented people. So that is who we are in Ontario. We're leading economic growth in this country largely because of our talented people.

>> MPP Singh: It's the same false logic. I didn't talk about the fact that we don't have a talented pool of people. It shows the government's lack of logical rationale. While talking on the topic of businesses in Ontario, the government should look at the chamber of commerce. The 2017 economic report states the experience that many households have are amplified. The uncertainty with respect to these rates are discouraging businesses from investing here in the province and that means less jobs for their people of Ontario. Here's the reality. We need to invest in infrastructure. We need to build affordable hydro and transportation infrastructure. But instead of selling a false choice, that people don't believe, will the government actually do that?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, it would be nice if the NDP would stop talking down our economy. Our business community and the people of this province and the talented people the Premier talked about have worked very hard with this government to build this economy up. They've created 700,000 net new jobs. Yet the party opposite keeps talking their efforts down. That's not fair. And then they say -- They talk those efforts down by saying they're part-time jobs. Wrong. 90% are full time. They talk them down by saying they're not good-paying jobs. Wrong. They say they're public sector jobs. Wrong.

MPP Yurek to Minister Hoskins Re: OHIP Coverage

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Last week I questioned the Premier about a life changing therapy for cerebral palsy. The government decided to approve the costs for Madison. There are many other children waiting for support on the already approved treatment. Will the Minister cut the red tape and approve the other children who are awaiting surgery today.

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Speaker, this is critically important issue, access to the highest quality healthcare. In this case specialized surgery for individuals, children that can benefit from this surgery. That's why it's an OHIP insured procedure. We rely on clinical expertise to make the determination whether or not the individual will benefit. That's what we've done. We've received I believe 17 applications. Of those, 4 did not have the support of their specialist. I believe two are still under consideration. And 10 have, perhaps now 11, have been approved. Those individuals have gone for their surgery or are in the process of preparing to go. This is a system that is working

effectively. I understand there do remain certain challenges.

>> MPP Yurek: Back to the Minister, I have over 21 names here of children who are lost in the bureaucrat nightmare this government has created. With this government, the only way to get access to services is to raise it in the legislature. What is the government going to do for all these children? Will the Speaker do the right thing and get surgery for these children?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, it appears the member opposite has recently obtained his medical degree. We need to leave it to the clinical experts to make the determinations. Virtually 100% of the time where an application is based in the province of Ontario with the support of the clinical expert, that application has been approved. We have two clinics in the province. We're also working with sick kids the possibility of establishing the expertise to perform the surgery here in the province to provide that service not in another country but here in Ontario. So we have a process. The member is wondering how long that takes. It's an evidence based decision.

MPP French to Minister Thibeault Re: Winter Disconnections

>> MPP Jennifer French: The Premier promised winter hydro disconnections would stop. Georgina pays her hydro bill to a company that submetres her apartment building. This company is regulated by the oeb but they are not being told to stop disconnections. So she's had her power cut off. What is the Premier going to do to get her power back on?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As mentioned last week, we passed the legislation to give the oeb the power to end winter disconnections. We were pleased the oeb acted quickly and decisively. On Thursday last week the oeb issued a decision to all companies. Customers to be rejected at no cost and ordered the removal of any load limiters. The oeb has announced a comprehensive hearing and review process. I'd be happy to speak with the member afterwards to ensure that we can get all of the information

>> MPP French: It would seem the Minister is also disconnected. There's a loophole in the Premier's promise. It Premier surely must have been briefed about the loophole. I guess she didn't choose to fix the problem. It looks like the Liberals are interested in scoring a political win. When did the Premier learn about this loophole and what is she going to do to close it?

>> Minister Thibeault: Again, Mr. Speaker, the oeb has acted quickly on this and making sure all local utilities will stop winter disconnects. It happened last Thursday. We're making sure that everyone, Mr. Speaker, is going to be reconnected as soon as possible. The important thing, Mr. Speaker, is we acted on this. We started talking about this in June. Now we're very pleased to see this happening. We're going to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that we continue to find ways to help all ratepayers across the province. We're going to come forward with the real action plan. One that's not based off ideology and not on ideas. We have really good ideas that we're bringing forward, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Fraser to Minister Lalonde Re: Fentanyl Crisis

>> MPP John Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was back in my home town of Ottawa last night at a meeting organized by the city of Ottawa and councillors. This is an important issue. Maybe you could listen. This is a serious issue. There have been three deaths in the city of Ottawa in the last two months that we know of due to fentanyl -- Fentanyl and opioid overdose. Those are the ones we know about. There were a lot of sad stories last night. One father was telling the story of his son who has been addicted for 5 years. This is the message he sent. This is new. Fentanyl is extremely dangerous. What I want to know is what we're doing.

>> Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Voice of Interpreter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for the work they're doing on this case to raise it here in the House. My Colleague was telling me about some of the stories he heard yesterday. When I think I would like us to not take this on a partisan approach. We know it's something that was in Ottawa yesterday. We also know it's

across all of our province. I will explain a little bit what we're doing and how I'm reaching out to our chief of police.

>> MPP Fraser: I thank the Minister. I can't stress the urgency with which that work needs to be done. What Mike said last night was this is a different drug. One pill can kill you. The second pill can kill you. The third pill destroys you. My follow-up question is what are we doing to make sure that we put naloxone in the hands of our first responders.

>> Minister Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the member again for his question. We recently made some changes to enable all paramedics to administer naloxone on site. I want to say thank you to the great work they do and the tremendous work our police services have been doing in getting opioids off the streets. I know they need help to do better. Ontario's chief of police have reached out to me to support for our government. I will work with them and their police services to address the opioid addiction crisis. I want to reach out to all the parents of Ontario today in profound respect. We will not abandon them. We will be there for them, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Brown to Minister Thibeault Re: Energy Costs

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. We all know about the Minister of energy's mea culpa and hindsight. Liberals ignored the advice of their own experts when handing out twenty year contracts to friends. It could have saved Ontario 4 billion dollars if they listened. We know the 30 big renewable companies donated 1.3 million dollars to the Ontario Liberal party. My question to the Premier is given this regret about the bad contracts, will the Ontario Liberal party return the 1.3 million dollars in donations.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Investing in eliminating coal and building transmission as the leader of the opposition talked about was the right thing to do. Because of that, we have a clean, reliable system that we can depend on, Mr. Speaker. As I said, Mr. Speaker, hindsight is 20/20. I know the leader of the opposition knows hindsight. When it comes to the updated sex-ed curriculum, they did support it and then they didn't support it. Hindsight is something they know well. We have invested in a system that's very strong. We'll continue to find ways of lowering rates for everyone.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, I asked a serious question about hydro. The government has acknowledged their green energy act was a mistake. They signed bad contracts. The response I get from the Minister of energy was a smear on an unrelated topic. I'll try again. Directly to the Premier. How does the Premier reconcile the fact that we've overpaid for renewable energy. That if we listened to the auditor general we could have saved 4 billion. The Ontario Liberal party received 1.3 million dollars in donations. A very clear question. Given this mea culpa, will the Premier ensure the Ontario Liberal party returns the 1.3 million dollars to Ontario ratepayers because of these bad contracts?

>> Minister Thibeault: The green energy act, Mr. Speaker, the what was the absolute right thing to do, Mr. Speaker. How these contracts were negotiated, we could do better. That's what we're actually doing. We're finding ways of doing better for the people of Ontario and bringing forward a rate mitigation process that's going to help all families and all businesses across the province. When talking about savings for people, Mr. Speaker, we've already done that and we're going to continue to do. That the renegotiated Samsung agreement, 3.7 billion dollars in savings. Reduce fit prices. 1.9 million in savings. That was 800 million dollars. We've continued to do this, Mr. Speaker. While at the same time eliminating coal and rebuilding a system that they couldn't care for, that they left in

MPP Sattler to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Energy Costs

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Kristen and Robena live with 5 children. Like too

many working families they're struggling to keep the lights on. Anytime they fall behind on their hydro bills they must pay hefty fees and a larger deposit leading to bills as high as 1,000 dollars forcing them to cut back on necessities. This vicious circle gets worse. Why is the Premier ignoring the crisis faced by families like this and refusing to act now to keep hydro costs affordable?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: We have already begun to take action and we are bringing forward a plan that will continue to take action in the immediate term. The document the NDP brought out yesterday lays out a number of initiatives most of which wouldn't reduce electricity prices and none of which would reduce prices now. Some of them, I have no idea how they would do it. In terms of asking the federal government to forego revenue. We're going to bring forward a workable plan. We're going to bring forward an initiative that builds on the acts we've already taken. A real plan that will reduce electricity prices immediately.

>> MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, Chris and Rubena are doing everything they can. They have had to use the food bank multiple times. They've removed their children from extra curricular activities. Does this government think it's fair to make children pay the price for their failure to take real action on hydro rates?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think everyone in this House would agree that's unacceptable that any family would have to do that. That's why we're continuing to act. When we brought forward the 8% reduction, that's helping 5 million families across the province with small businesses and farms included in that. But we know that more needs to be done. So that's why we're continuing right now to work and continue to find ways to help families because we know, Mr. Speaker, that we have to rebuild that system. It was paramount for us to eliminate coal, to make sure we can have a clean and reliable system. We'll take it to the next level. We'll work hard to ensure we make this as affordable as possible for every family, for every business across our province from Windsor and Ontario and everyone in between.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Naqvi Re: Ticket Sales

>> MPP Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Attorney General. A huge number of hip fans especially those in my riding could not get tickets to see Canada's iconic band. In a matter of seconds across the province, tickets were sold out and they later appeared on the secondary market at very inflated rates. This happens with concerts, sporting events and all kinds of other cultural events where fans have trouble getting tickets no matter how hard they try. This is why I introduced bill 22 last fall. I was delighted that my pmb was supported unanimously. I know that our government agrees that we need to take action. Can the Attorney General please tell us about our government's plan.

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I wanted to thank the member for her leadership on this important issue. She brought a private member's bill to make sure fans do get access to tickets that are affordable and accessible and in a transparent way. What we saw, Speaker, happened last summer with tragically hip's farewell tour where people were not able to get a ticket. If tickets were available, they were available at a much higher price. I think many Ontarians, it really disturbed me. That's why we have announced our intention to take concrete steps by bringing legislation this spring that will make sure we're putting fans first in Ontario. We're making sure tickets are accessible and are affordable for fans. So we're working and building on private member's bill. In supplementary I'll give you more information.

>> MPP Kiwala: I would like to thank the Attorney General for his response. Many constituents and fans across the province are pleased to hear that the government is committed to taking action on this issue. By banning scalpers, the government is sending a clear message that they deserve a fair shot of buying tickets. I'm excited to be holding a round table tomorrow at 7 o'clock to hear from fans. I know constituents from across the province are very happy with the work already underway to give everyone a fair chance. I know the Attorney General would agree that we need to increase transparency in the ticket selling industry. Why this is going to be a difficult task, the Attorney

General, please tell us more about our government's plan to ban scalper bots.

>> Minister Naqvi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Want to thank the member for her leadership. I very much look forward to joining her tomorrow at the digital media zone for our consultation with fans. We invite people to attend that event at 7 PM Earlier today we launched an online survey at Ontario.ca/tickets. We encourage Ontarians to give us advice in 4 key areas. How can we make access to tickets more easy by giving everybody a fair shot at buying tickets. How can we make them more affordable. How can we make information about tickets more transparent. And of course how can we make sure these rules are fully enforced. This is a challenging task. There is no silver bullet answer. We're working with other jurisdictions like New York state which have the same kind of challenges to see if we can develop strategies. I look forward to working with members on this.

MPP Wilson to Minister Murray Re: Endangered Species

>> MPP Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of the environment. In October 2016 the environmental review tribunal ruled the appellants of the wind turbine projects had proven the turbines would cause harm to human health and endangered bats that live in the area. Now they're request ING a remedy hearing in the hopes of reversing the ruling. Why is WPD Canada being given a remedy hearing? The government's freedom of information records show wind turbines in Ontario far exceeded the approval limits for bat and bird kills.

>> Minister Glen Murray: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to meet with the member opposite with the authority I have to review the matter. The Minister has limits on our authority because we have a tribunal which I have a great deal of faith in. You may remember the member opposite repeatedly questioned me about the Collingwood airport issue. I said I can't insert myself in that because I legally have no authority to do it and I would probably have to resign if I did that. It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the hearing resulted in changes made by the ert with no interference with the government or ministry. I think somewhat to the satisfaction of the member opposite. Let's have faith in our tribunal process.

>> MPP Wilson: Minister, it's your policy that the tribunal is following. It's your green energy act. So you're ultimately responsible for this issue. It's been proven that wind turbines kill bats and also attract migratory bats and kill them as well. Local residents and governments are spending their own money doing what the Minister should be doing, and that's enforcing the endangered species act. It's now bringing about project poverty by forcing citizens to spend hundreds of thousands to oppose wind turbine projects and protect the environment. It is Minister committed to protecting endangered species or do wind turbine projects take priority?

>> Minister Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would be very clear that we have with the endangered species act, the Minister of natural resources and forestry, very strong protections. We have the strongest protections in North America on endangered species. I would point out that we in Québec and Nova Scotia are the only jurisdiction in the Americas that have greenhouse gas reductions below 1990 levels or have met the Kyoto protocol which his party took us out of. Our energy system and our environmental strategies have left us as one of only 3 jurisdictions in the Americas that have below 1990 levels and tracking on that. Given the leader of his party and his Colleagues who have a track record of destroying international agreements and increasing greenhouse gas emissions which would do a lot more damage than just a bat, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Gretzky to Minister Thibeault Re: Energy Costs

>> MPP Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. For people living in Windsor like Mary, even the most basic services are more and more out of reach. I'm not talking about luxuries. Mary doesn't have a pool, a hot tub or even a dishwasher. It's just basic living she says. The price, a 200 dollar electricity bill. Double what she was paying last year. Will this Liberal government

listen to Mary, finally admit that electricity is a necessity, not a luxury and begin to treat it that way?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to find ways to help people like Mary and every other family and business in this province. We did start by starting on January 1st with the 8% reduction and for the r2 customers, 330 House holds. They're seeing a reduction. There are programs in place to help people like Mary. I do hope Mary is looking at some of those programs. We are working hard to continue to find ways to reduce cost. We do recognize the system that we built, Mr. Speaker, eliminating coal, rebuilding the grid, that cost billions of dollars. We know that cost came at the expense of many families. That's why we're looking at ways of ensuring that we can continue to find some downward pressure on rates and bring immediate action and relief.

>> MPP Gretzky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not day goes by when I don't hear another hydro horror story. Parents can't buy school supplies, or send them to summer camp because of the hydro bills. Businesses can't afford to expand. Some have already closed. I invite the Premier to come to Windsor and listen to how difficult it's becoming to afford the most basic needs like medication for seniors. I'll introduce her to my constituents. I'll even buy her lunch. People need more action. Not Liberal talking points. They need more than 5 dollars off this month and maybe 6 dollars off the next. Will the government end the sell-off of Hydro One and offer a real plan.

>> Minister Thibeault: Once again, Mr. Speaker, as we said there are several programs that help these families significantly. We're also making sure that the 8% reduction, that started as of January 1st. That's a significant reduction for many families and farms and businesses. That took effect as of January 1st. Many of those families are seeing the full benefits. We recognize the investments we made in this system, making sure that we're off coal, making sure we have a clean reliable system, that came with a cost. Now we're taking it to the next level. We're working hard on finding other ways to reduce costs for this family and all families and businesses.

MPP Malhi to Minister Ballard Re: Homelessness

>> MPP Harinder Malhi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of housing and Minister responsible for the poverty reduction strategy. I'm proud that our government has committed to end chronic homelessness by 2025. It's a shared responsibility. I'm pleased to see that our government has significantly increased the support for the homelessness prevention initiative. This is receiving 15.3 million dollars. By 2019 this investment in homelessness prevention will grow to 17.8 million dollars. Can the Minister tell the House how the increases will help ensure all Ontarians are given the supports they deserve.

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, to the hard working member for that great question. I'm proud to say that Ontario is the leader in the fight against homelessness. To reach our goal of ending chronic homelessness we're focussing on prevention. I can report all areas of Ontario received an increase in community homeless prevention initiative. Significantly increased funding in Durham, York, Peel, Halton and other communities will help these service managers better support the needs across the communities. This will decrease the need for people to migrate to Toronto for services. It provides services like housing, transportation assistance and life skills coaching. We're investing more and more every year in all communities to help them fight homelessness in their streets.

>> MPP Mahli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to see Ontario is taking strong action by empowering municipalities across the province in the fight against homelessness. I want to recognize the many front line staff who demonstrate the strength of our community in supporting our most vulnerable. A community isn't a bunch of people living in the same place. It's a shared sense of responsibility to one another. Both our successes and struggles bind us together. More work need to be done. Can the Minister explain what the government is doing to encourage the community leadership and ensure wrap around solutions to those who need our help the most.

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Again, thank you to the member for the question. To our municipal partners across Ontario who are working hard to end homelessness. We began our work by striking an expert panel on homelessness and used their input to shape the path, our path and the path forward. We're focussing our efforts to prevent homelessness on those most at risk including the chronically homeless, youth, indigenous people and individuals transitioning out of provincial institutions. We know chronic homelessness is a serious issue. So in the coming weeks, we're moving forward with an unprecedented investment housing support to help eliminate the obstacles that keep people in a cycle of homelessness. Freeing them to rebuild their lives and maintain stable homes. I really look forward to sharing the details.

MPP Clark to Minister Murray Re: Electric Cars

>> MPP Steve Clark: Question for the Minister of the environment. I want to replay the facts. In February, the Minister of the environment announced the 14,000 dollar Tesla luxury car rebate. I have the press release right here to prove it. It's supposedly a part of his action plan. Around the same time, the Minister's former chief of staff started working at Tesla. The Minister claims it was the Minister of transportation. My question is simple, yes or no, did the Minister of environment's office participate in the luxury car rebate program.

>> Minister Glen Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've been very clear on this. It was last spring the decisions were made. They were made by the government. The ministry of transportation is the administrative unit. They developed the program. Number three, Mr. Speaker, the person involved did exactly what I would want our staffers to do. Immediately upon looking to leave government went to the integrity commissioner, met with the integrity commissioner. I got a letter that was copied on that. The integrity commissioner said they followed all the rules. I would hope we have respect for people who follow the rules which was the case here. That should end it, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Clark: Again, I want to reiterate this press release from the government on this program change came from his ministry. The Minister of environment and climate change. The time for this government is to put their money where their mouth is. I filed an order paper question. I can go under freedom of information. I'm going to ask the Minister this question. Will he release all the emails that contain the word Tesla that were issued by his former chief of staff. Yes or no.

>> Minister Murray: Mr. Speaker, I will say it again. This decision was made by the government last spring. Clearly made by the government. The decision was made last spring...Again, when the political staffer involved decided to leave government, he did what every political staffer should do. Went and met with the integrity commissioner. Did a full disclosure. Then got a letter back. Giving him complete clearance. And rules to follow. He followed those rules.

MPP Vanthof to Minister Thibeault Re: Energy Costs

>> MPP John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The Curling club is cornerstone. It burned to the ground. Through the dedication of its members and support from the community, it was totally rebuilt. It's totally modern. Now it faces an even greater challenge. Last year the membership fees were 42,000 dollars. Their hydro bill was 46,000 dollars. So you know where that's going. How is it that we've come to this? Our rural way of life is being destroyed by your hydro policy.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, it's great to talk about Curling. I know Sudbury has a great Curling club as well. They've talked to me about their electricity bill. I put them in touch with their local utility. Their local utility that worked with them on the save on energy program. The save on energy program is now saving that Curling club thousands every month. I encourage that member to utilize the programs in your area. Use the programs in place. We rebuilt this system. We made sure

it's clean. Now we're making sure it's affordable for every single business and every single person in this province.

>> MPP Vanthof: Minister, with all due respect, this example is a brand new facility. They've done everything they could to save energy. They have worked with every program available as have most people in this province. I'm sure most, anyone who comes in our office, we make sure we look for every program available. And yet this club and many others like it are in danger of closing because they can't pay their hydro bills. The real question is your ministry has analysts, policy analysts, long-term energy plans. How did you not foresee this happening? Why did it have to come to crisis before you realized the people in rural Ontario can't pay their bills. How did it come to this?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It came to this, Mr. Speaker, because for decades when they were in power never invested in the system. It was up to us to rebuild it. That doesn't happen overnight. We made sure it's green and clean. We're going to continue to work hard, Mr. Speaker, for the folks that are in rural parts of our province. We started, Mr. Speaker, with the triple rate reduction. We're going to continue to find ways of finding programs that will help these organizations just like we did in Sudbury, and Thunder Bay, like we've done across our great province. We'll continue to find ways to help.